

Dr. Crane Hands Us a Spiritual Oil Shine

By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

I HAD not read ten pages of Dr. Frank Crane's 21 when I felt like a man who was sitting in a chair in the barber shop of the Archangel Sleek getting a spiritual oil shine and a mess of hot towels preparatory to my ascension and beatification in the Seventh Heaven of the Sacrosanct Stupidities.

Then as my oil glistened boots sank deeper and deeper into the radiant dish-water, now lapping at the last chunk of my still unregenerate and hell bent consciousness, a change came over the spirit of my dream.

I was back in Philadelphia in the 1880's. A prim two story house. Scraper, door-mat, busybody glass, two turnbuckles for each shutter and an insurance shield nailed into the bricks. Inside a parlor—a Philadelphia parlor of the '80s—ah! do you know it, gentle rebels and you elder nighthawks who have emigrated to New York and Paris?

The black horsehair furniture. The wall paper which was copied from a pattern in Lippincott's Magazine. The flowers from Fairmount Park in a vase in the corner. And in the centre the table on which reposed a velvet bound album. Opening the album, you always read:

"Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood."
"AUNT ESTHER."

Or,

"A light heart goeth all the day."
"UNCLE JER."

Of course you were not 21 when all this fell under your eye. You were much younger, and thought so little about being just so! that you were licked or reprimanded each day. And when you got to be 21, if you were pulsing, had red, sinful blood in you, and believed somewhat in wise Old Nick, you took a chance on having a kind heart, went after some coronets/knew that simple faith was a form of static stupidity and that Norman blood is a very valuable asset if you have the "artistic temperament"; also that a light heart hasn't much to say to the world, but that a heart battered like the forts at Verdun and full of temptations, tears and iron is the way to the summits of manhood and womanhood.

If you thought, further, that character was greater than "goodness," that "virtue" was purely the business on nonagenarians and people who work the business panel game through life, you tossed the album out of the window, bought a copy of Emerson's anarchistic *Self-Reliance*, Anacreon's odes to the vine, the *Rugaiyat*, or James Huneker's autobiography (not then written, but what's an anachronism in a dream?).

But there is Doctor Crane, and being unquestionably a man of great force of character and one who writes in the great style, we cannot get rid of him by a fable or two. I read him, furtively, each night in the *Globe*, and my reactions are various.

He is a man at war with his pen. The right lobe of his brain is pagan; the left lobe is hopelessly puritan; while in his forehead there shines a star—that some days gleams like Sirius, and on others is pure, unalloyed paste. He is a poet and a preacher. He is a lyricist and a bore. He is at times capable of great flights, when you look up, and say, "Look at Doc!—he's going to soar as high as Victor Hugo or Emerson; he's going to lose all his Christian duds and homemade tights! Hip! Hip!"—but alas! there is always the paid village policeman waiting below to catch him in the old ostermoor of respectability. And you turn sadly to Tomorrow's Entries.

Doctor Crane is a victim. He is a victim of the innate and ineradicable American disease—optimism. Always bring the Glad Tidings (and the bacon) home. Make some one happy. Tidy up the little corner. Smile, damn you, smile! Dine three times a day off your mental obesity. Admit nothing; claim everything. Keep the home suttee burning. Think it, but don't



say it. "Be decent, will you!" Frowns don't get you anywhere, old man. He's a gentleman and he belongs to my club. He was a model citizen. Get in the Uplift Game, you boob!

Optimism in America is a form of moral cowardice. It is the optimism of fear, not the optimism of courage. We confuse progress with civilization. Progress is the art of going forward and leaving yourself behind. Civilization is the art of going forward upward and leaving nothing behind. Germany is progressive and barbarous; France is civilized, but not very progressive.

What we need in this country is more exfoliation and less platitudes. America to-day is making the sublimest gesture that has ever been made in history. It is the end of Sir Smug in literature. We have the vision. We must have the voice. *Leaves of Grass* (unabridged) should be put into every high school—and Voltaire and Guy de Maupassant.

But back to 21. It is in ten chapters and tells us what the quasi-reverend Doctor would do if he were 21 again. It is

all too conscious, too superficial; takes no heed of heredity or environment. It is a blue print, a gingerbread moral tract, a book for snobs and psychic tightwads. Money, money, money, "getting on," land your fish, keep out of jail—all the old clichés are here, all old kohinoors of the ancient English, lawnrolling, logrolling platitudinarians.

Chapter X. starts off with the grand old bludgeons, God, Duty, Death and Moral Responsibility. Polonius runs the gamut.

The First Grave Digger maunders over the skull of Spontaneity and Impulse. Young Gobbo and Old Gobbo just out of Oxford (we recall that Shelley was kicked out of a university and Edgar Poe was fired out of West Point).

Probably the stupidest thing the talented Doctor ever did. Imagine one of our boys reading 21 before going into the hell of Chateau Thierry! We understand there will be teething rings with the second edition.

21. DR. FRANK CRANE. Doubleday, Page & Co. 50 cents.

"You're Only Young Once"

By CONSTANCE MURRAY GREENE

WHEN Margaret Widdemer turns from a poet into a novelist she does a Jekyll and Hyde trick which amounts almost to a psychic phenomenon. From her poetry you would expect fiction in a class with Edith Wharton, Anne Douglas Sedgwick and May Sinclair, instead of which you get the Pollyanna, Laddie, Mary Cary kind of doctored romance which a poet like Ella Wheeler Wilcox at her faintest or Theodosia Garrison might give vent to.

All that the publishers say of *You're Only Young Once* is true. There are eight romances and it does "come like a sunny day in the gray of war times." Perhaps we ought not to expect more and yet we do. It is not possible to content ourselves with this sort of thing from the author of *The Old Road to Paradise*. There was an interview with Margaret Widdemer in one of our papers some time ago in which she had a good deal to say about Robert Louis Stevenson's responsibility for the "glad" element in literature and she was badly criticised for what she said by people who failed to realize that she was one of the "glad" writers herself.

In *You're Only Young Once* Miss Widdemer demonstrates the easiest way of writing a novel. She takes a family of eight and chops the book up into eight romances, marrying off each member of the family in turn after following the affairs from their inception to the final "close up." Thus all the trouble of sus-

taining a plot, attending to sequence and balance and the rest of those awful bugbears of novelists are avoided. It makes an ungainly sort of novel, but the enormous amount of sunshine and the much favored word combinations, the really truly love at first sight monarch of all he surveyed sort of writing, cover a multitude of literary sins.

The day that *The Rose Garden Husband* became a best seller was an evil one for its author. Encouraged by this success, she followed with more of the same sort, *Why Not* and *The Wishing Ring Man*, both popular though less so than the first. People like Margaret Widdemer's books because they are clever and human beneath the silliness, but in *You're Only Young Once* she does seem to be laying it on a bit thick.

The introduction of the Muffhound is a characteristic piece of her cleverness, one of the earmarks of the best seller. It gives the publishers a chance to be tantalizing. Now a Muffhound isn't a dog at all, that is it isn't a canine. Isabella Goldsborough, the youngest of the family of eight, had one and thought she had another, but she was deceived. If you think you can discover what a Muffhound is here you are wrong.

And by the way why not get the title right? For Miss Widdemer means *You're Young Only Once* and not *You're Only Young Once*.

YOU'RE ONLY YOUNG ONCE. BY MARGARET WIDDERMER. Henry Holt & Co. \$1.50.

"Billy and the Major"

BOOKS about children for children, and books about children for grownups, compare for resemblance and contrast, about like paper play hats and paper money, wooden swords and wooden penholders, lead soldiers and lead bullets. Penrod wouldn't enjoy *Penrod* as much as Penrod's father would. Schoolboys might view the Varmint, the Tennessee Shad and the rest of the immortal crew of young Lawrencevillians with indifference or scorn, while the stories command the affection of the elders through their contribution to self-defensive self-deceit. We can imagine real children yawning over *Helen's Babies*, and a wounded soldier forgetting his aches while reading it.

The books about children which are most pleasing to grown folk are not the best books for children to read. They give too many hints to incredibly receptive and active young minds. Is it slyly, for the sake of these hints, that children stand for such a lot of thinly disguised preaching in their unquestionably favorite stories?

Although packed, jammed full of the infantile sayings and doings which endlessly amuse men and women—especially those who are not "bringing up" children of their own—*Billy and the Major* is not a "juvenile." It will make the Majors chuckle, but the Billies would find more fun in original pranks.

The story has no plot, but it has continuity and development, structure. Back of the recital of the children's funny sayings is a skilfully revealed history of a fine friendship between a little boy and a man; and back of that is the tracing of a softening—ripening—process in the kind but somewhat harsh nature of little Billy's aunt, the Major's wife. A rather austere lady, she did everything for Billy—except call him Billy. When at last she drops the oppressive "William" for the friendly "Billy" no one needs to be told how Aunt Minerva has grown in the grace of living; and the author deserves credit and thanks for refraining from expatiation.

The small boy is a Tennessean; his pal is a little negro boy; and they cram the book with a dialect which gets less bothersome as the pages pass and the eye adjusts itself to the distortions of orthography; still, with a reduction of about 50 per cent. in the use of apostrophes, it would be just as effective, as dialect, and much more sightly, as print. There are some vulgarities, which may be, according to the views of the sifter in judgment, on the order either of *Peck's Bad Boy* or Mark Twain. We shall not, either to praise or blame, pillage the story, but it dulls no edge to call the roll of its personae: The wise and genial Major; the aunt, who is learning life late but well; the funny little negro boy, the two little girls, fat Jimmy; the quaint old darky cook, the wicked old billy goat, the severe schoolmarm and Miss Minerva's baby—and the jolly little chap, brave, generous, affectionate, who most properly leads off in the title. And there must be a word for the illustrator, whose twenty drawings, of no over refined art but full of homely character, fit the story exactly.

The publishers tell us that the volume to which this is a sequel, *Miss Minerva and William Green Hill*, has had a run of more than 200,000 copies. Books that sell like that don't come in for literary criticism.

BILLY AND THE MAJOR. BY EMMA SPEED SAMPSON. Reilly & Britton. \$1.

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